

The political situation in Latin America and the Caribbean area.
(Speech of Mr. R. Zaandam)

Mr. Chairman, Comrades, distinguished guests,

I am sure you will have comprehension for the fact that I will focus my address on the political development of our Caribbean Region. The occasion of this Conference is the 10th Anniversary of our M.E.P.-party, a party that was founded because none of the existing parties suited the needs of the Aruban people. Our party is proud of its achievement in this past 10 years. Besides being the ruling party in Aruba and coalition partner in the Central Government, we were admitted to the prestigious organisation "Socialist International" last November in Madrid.

By applying for the membership we have indicated the direction in which we want to lead this island. But by exercising our political will and going after socialdemocratic goals we stand the chance of being accused of contributing to the unrest of this region. The problem for us, people of the Caribbean region, is that we have always been kept quiet for almost 300 years. The United States, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands have for 300 years regulated our existence and all of a sudden have labeled us "as being a trouble spot of the first order". Why? Because of the emerging of political parties as the M.E.P.-party and its political leaders who are not subordinating the interest of their members and people, to the interest of the so-called established order.

Nowadays it is very fashionable to use the word "geo-politics".

I wonder how many of those, who frequently use the expression "geo-politics" to defend their position, really know the origin of the word and how it has been abused, as we the people of the Caribbean region can testify. The mere presence of people of different races on these islands is one of the evidence.

When in 1901 the Swedish professor Rudolf Kjellen first used the word "geo-politics" in a Swedish newspaper article, it was the beginning of a pseudo-scientific legalisation of what we know now as post-colonialism. This same "geo-politics" was used by the councillor of the Nazi forces in Germany, Karl Haushofer, who called it "Lebensraum". Loosely translated it means "space for existence".

Geography has no logic, no justice, no theory and it puts no one in the right. The Caribbean region is what it is, about one thousand islands with more than 30 million souls living on these islands, who have only one thing in common, namely that they are island-inhabitants.

There is great difference in origin, language, culture, history and political dependency. There has never been and never will be something that the Western view calls the Caribbean unity, because the nature of this region was never intended to be bended into one unit. Now after 300 years we, who did not ask to be implanted on these islands are being labeled as trouble-some because we differ from the ideas of those who 3 centuries ago had other things in mind than teaching us unity. We don't live up to the expectations of their geo-politics.

The United Kingdom wanted to impose on the English-speaking islands a federation, it did not work. France maintains its point of view that territory at 3000 kms. distance from Europe is part of it. The United States did not ask the inhabitants of the now called U.S. Virgin Islands

whether or not they agreed with the transaction that took place between Denmark and the United States in 1917, when the sale of these islands was concluded for the amount of 25 million dollars. This sale was part of the "geo-politics" of the United States, as was the military action undertaken by the United States to protect their economical interest in Haïti, the second territory of this region to become independant, after the United States.

The U.S. occupied and governed Haïti for 19 years between 1911 and 1930. To-day the whole world is pointing an accusing finger in the direction of Haïti where human rights don't exist and the majority of its population is living in poverty. But the whole history of Haïti is drenched with abuses and acts of treasons, beginning with the capture of Pierre Francois Dominique Toussaint L'Ouverture who succeeded in defeating the French army but was captured and sent to France where he died in a jail when he was signing a peace treaty with the French general he had defeated.

Mr. Chairman, I'm not defending the present-day situation in Haïti. I just want to make clear that what we see happening in Haïti might well be the lessons the Haïtians have learned from those who had much to do with the development of the Caribbean region in the past.

Unfortunately Mr. Chairman, we the people of this region have been divided along the lines of the interest of the colonial powers and up to 25 years ago, English speaking, French speaking and Dutch speaking West Indians, as we were called, had no contact whatsoever with each other. For the past 25 years the political world situation has called for decolonisation and we have seen from the part of the United Kingdom a desire for a rapid push in the direction of independency of its possession in the West Indies coached by world power interest to establish a grand federation and when this failed, to make sure that the Caribbean region remained a natural sphere of interest and influence of the United States. Now the Netherlands has arrived at the same stage of development with its six islands, islands which were grouped together by random by the Dutch Colonial powers 300 years ago. Three islands off the coast of Venezuela and three other islands about 400 miles away in the vicinity of Puerto Rico.

Mr. Chairman, neither the colonial government, nor the semi-autonomous situation after 1954 have brought to us a sense of unity, because physically and spiritually we experience the constitutional bound as something artificial.

But we are also being told, as they did with the English speaking islands that it would be in our own interest to stay together.

Mr. Chairman, those who are trying to convince us to do just that are outlining their own politics and are trying to make sure that they can keep on controlling all events in this region.

I wish I could say that we could look up to good examples of countries grouped together for their own benefit, but all that we see is disagreement and problems. Examples, Mr. Chairman?

The fight for fishing rights between Iceland, Great-Brittain, Ireland Holland, Germany and France.

The disagreement between the members of the European Economic Community when they have to defend their national interest in connection with agriculture and life-stock products.

And why, Mr. Chairman?

Because the politicians from France, the United Kingdom, Italy, Germany, Holland and the other members have difficulties in selling the idea of an European unity to their own constituents.

And yet, Mr. Chairman, these same politicians want to impose on us, members of an island population, a form of Caribbean unity that we can not sell to our communities.

Mr. Chairman, I think that the time has come for the Western world to realize that they cannot continue to deny the right of the island nations in the Caribbean area to determine their own future. In this process we are willing to take in account certain regional interest, but this can never happen at the expense of our sovereignty. The Western world will have to reckon with the fact that the Caribbean region's old structures will disappear. For the Western world the choice will not be whether to maintain or protect these structures, but they will have to choose between associating their interest with a vanishing system or to try to give a helping hand to moderate and constructive alternatives. The Western world will have to choose between gains on short term or help to realize the aspirations of the people of the Caribbean region. An example of what I mean to say is what is taking place right now in El Salvador.

Are we going to deny the working class of El Salvador the right to achieve structural changes within its society?

Are we going to send arms to every trouble spot in Latin America and the Caribbean region, because their views don't coincide with our geopolitical views?

How can we pretend to tell the Eastern block: "hands off from the Polish worker, let him settle his internal affairs without interference from outside" but at the same time we are supplying a government in Latin America with arms to prevent the peasant there to achieve the same improvements the Polish laborer is looking for.

Mr. Chairman, Here in Aruba we are struggling to give the Aruban people the right to decide in its own affairs. The M.E.P.-party was founded to do just that and for the past 10 years we have had the support of the majority of our people. Aruba is going to be one of the islands in the Caribbean region that will become independent on its own.

It is up to Western world to decide if the road leading to the independence of Aruba will be smooth or dotted with problems and obstacles.

Mr. Chairman, the way our party sees the development of our region could mean the start of a complete new approach of this region.

Acknowledging the interest the world and regional powers have in the Caribbean area, we are willing to take in consideration certain guidelines.

We know that it is in our own interest to refrain from activities that would cause us to be isolated from our neighbours. It was on account of these considerations that our party and our government went along with the request of the former President of the United States to boycott the Olympic games in Moscow.

But on the other hand the people of these islands are entitled to get an opportunity to resolve their problems, and problems we do have, Mr. Chairman.

We want to resolve these problems in our own way, based on the freely expressed will of the people.

I think that our party can be seen at the interpreter of the feelings that exist among us, the people of the Caribbean, that is, that we will reject any regulation imposed on us.

We are not looking for isolation, in contrary, we are looking for new forms of cooperation within our region, putting aside all the divisions the colonial powers of the past forged on us. We advocate the right of self-determination for every single island in the Caribbean and only after having made use of this right, can we sit down and try to establish new forms of cooperation. Every move contrary to this thought will be counterproductive for those who will try to prevent us to establish our own identity.

Mr. Chairman, in ending I would like you and this Conference to listen to a fragment of the inauguration speech of Mr. Ronald Reagan.

(Pause for speech of the President of the United States).

I want to accept that Mr. Reagan's objectives are to have peace in Central America and the Caribbean region. But these goals can not be attained by imposing his geo-politics on us or by sending arms to certain groups or governments.

I made you listen to his words pronounced on the day he took office to make sure that what we are asking is in accordance with his own words. But the time has come to convert these words into deeds.

These deeds are not achieved by saying that we live in his backyard. This expression is proof that Mr. Reagan does not know the mentality of the people of the Caribbean. When we say that someone is living in your backyard it has some denigrating.

The Western world has to realize that changes are coming to Latin America and the Caribbean region.

We don't want these changes to be accompanied by violence. But one will have to expect some shocks because poverty and past colonial humiliation run too deep in this area to be simply wiped off and forgotten. And if these signs are not understood then, Mr. Chairman, they will need a whole armada to control all these one thousand islands under the Caribbean sun.

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